



Europe and Whiteness: Challenges to European Identity and European Citizenship in Light of 'Brexit' and the 'Refugees / Migrants Crisis'

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Abstract:	This article sets to use the current 'Refugees / Migrants Crisis' and "Brexit" as illustrative of the numerous challenges the European Union faces today when it comes to its identity and the construction of a 'European citizenship'. By discussing the proliferation of borders in the European continent and by analysing the sociological significance of such proliferation, the article argues that Europe is experiencing an ontological and epistemological rather than existential crisis that relates to its incapacity of acknowledging, and critically engaging with, its fundamental neo-colonial and neo-liberal matrix. The article argues that the stalemate experienced by the European Union with respect to its regional and global relevance can only be overcome by bringing to the surface buried or disqualified knowledges about 'who counts as European' beyond whiteness.

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Europe and Whiteness: Challenges to European Identity and European Citizenship in Light of Brexit and the ‘Refugees / Migrants Crisis’

Introduction

In Italian history, there is a recurrent quote attributed to Massimo d’Azeglio, writer and politician, who lived during the country’s unification in 1861: ‘we have made Italy. We must now make Italians’ (Gigante 2011). Transposed in the context of Europe, these words appear more relevant and compelling than ever. In fact, confronted with the seemingly insurmountable obstacle of finding a coherent and transversal political, cultural, moral and social identity, Europe (understood for the purpose of this article as ‘the European Union’) appears as an ephemeral cocoon whose frailty and transparency reveals the lack of a distinguishable vital core. Hence, more than a half a century after its creation, the question is still pressing: once we have made Europe, should we also make Europeans? And if we make ‘Europeans’, what should they look like in light of fast-changing global relations?

This article attempts to answer these theoretical questions by shedding light on current definitions of ‘Europeanness’ in terms of both common identity, and the seemingly intangible existence of a form of supra-national ‘European citizenship’. In order to do so, it resorts to the current ‘Refugees / Migrants Crisis’ and ‘Brexit’ as illustrations of the limits, challenges and potential of the European project of integration, focusing in particular on the proliferation of borders in the European continent and its sociological significance. Ultimately, the analysis seeks to evaluate whether the very project of European integration is in danger of becoming irrelevant and what a solution to this potential political irrelevance may be. This evaluation has particular importance in post-Brexit Europe, given the heightened fear that the European Union may become increasingly weakened vis-à-vis growing nationalist movements throughout the continent and, more broadly, in the international arena.

In an address to the European Parliament in September 2016, the president of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker [1], has affirmed that the European Union (EU) is in the midst of an ‘existential crisis’. This article will argue that Europe and European citizenship are undergoing an ontological and epistemological crisis, rather than a crisis that threaten its immediate existence. What seems to be missing from today’s debates on Europe and its future, is the capacity of its inhabitants (both at the level of the political élites and the general population) to engage in a critical project of scrutiny and de-construction of all the received

preconceptions about Europe deriving from its history and past. This aspect has been strongly emphasised in the work of Hansen (2002), who acknowledges the lack of a systematic engagement with the post-colonial present of Europe, particularly in connection with the process of European Integration. The crisis is epistemological, rather than existential, because the dominant narrative on Europe and Europeanness seems to be a 'narrative of coherence'. This narrative forecloses the possibility of contradiction, multiplicity and portrays Europe as inherently *white* (Hansen 2004; Hansen and Jonsson 2014), despite the immense religious and/or ethno-cultural diversity, that has always characterised – and continues to do so – the European continent (Linke 2010, 103). Ultimately, this lack of creative capacity for a multi-layered decolonial conception of Europe may have consequences for its very chances of success and prosperity. Reasoning with Foucault (2004, 7), therefore, it is important to allow the emergence of both 'buried' and 'disqualified' forms of knowledge, that is to say forms of knowledge about what 'Europe' is usually confined to the margins. More specifically, Foucault's (2004, 28) suggest that

(...) rather than asking ourselves what the sovereign looks like from high, we should be trying to discover how multiple bodies, forces, energies, matters, desires, thoughts, and so on are gradually, progressively, actually and materially constituted as subject, or as the subject.

Foucault's suggestion invites us to question the definition of Europeanness as a productive process of identity definition (and by extension of legal belonging through citizenship) enacted by means of homogenisation and systematisation of historical and biographical elements. His reflections on 'disqualified knowledges' require us to embark on a genealogy of Europeanness that privileges *liminal* forms of creation of knowledge, where the word *liminal* can be both referring to subaltern character of such knowledge(s), as well as to the idea of the *limes* (the border in Latin) in geographical terms. This endeavour, furthermore, is in line with what de Sousa Santos (2012, 51) has called 'the Epistemologies of the South', that is to say forms of knowledge proper of groups that have been discriminated through capitalism and/or colonialism.

By reflecting on two phenomena such as the 'Refugees/Migrants Crisis', as well as on 'Brexit', this analysis will suggest that the European project of integration can overcome so-called contemporary "crises", only through a critical questioning of what it means to be European, and who counts as such. This endeavour should be accompanied by the fostering of

an epistemological uncertainty about who Europeans are, what they are bound to do, as well as about what Europe should look like in terms of their ethnic, religious, gendered and social composition. Ultimately, this privileging of uncertainty should not be configured as the ideal terrain where fear and nationalism and xenophobia flourish (as it is currently often the case), but as an opportunity to reconsider European history as the result of the complex interweaving of various social, political, ethnic and religious elements throughout the centuries.

This article is composed of four sections. The first section considers the extent to which various ‘crises’ such as migration from the Southern shores of the Mediterranean and Brexit are challenging or threatening the very concept of European identity and citizenship. The second section will analyse the role of the border in creating, securing and protecting a crystallised form of European identity that is inherently white and neo-colonial. Here, two different theoretical contributions from LaCecla (2009) and Walia (2013), who propose very different interpretations for the sociological and anthropological role of the border, are put into dialogue. The third and fourth sections analyse two distinct but interrelated phenomena such as the ‘Refugees / Migrants Crisis’ and ‘Brexit’ by showing how current conceptualisations and responses to both phenomena are grounded in a regressive neo-liberal and neo-colonial understanding of Europeanness, both in ontological and epistemological terms. It is also argued that insistence on adopting a restricted epistemological stance on ‘what counts as Europe’ will inevitably lead to a loss of relevance of the European Union as both a point of reference for individuals throughout the continent, and in the international arena. Ultimately, the article suggests that future theoretical and empirical engagements with both concepts of ‘European identity’ and ‘European citizenship’ should address more organically the inherent whiteness of Europeanness as foregrounding its ontology and the epistemological approach to the question of ‘who counts as European’. This critical engagement can help to recast the colonial past as a timely reminder of how both the concept and the wealth of Europe were built, as well as the future moral and material responsibility that Europe holds towards the rest of the world.

European Identity and European Citizenship in Crisis?

The question of the identity of Europe underlies the problem of the global distribution of power, as increasingly the old dichotomies between East / West or North / South cease to provide a meaningful mapping of the global power relations and a fundamental questioning

and (potential) displacement of centuries-old colonial and imperial relations slowly takes place. Confronted with this loss of epistemological points of reference, Europe attempts to articulate an identitarian response in order to counter the danger of global irrelevance. To do so, however, it is faced with the need to confront the weaknesses and the ambiguities underlying the whole process of European integration. This process of self-discovery and self-affirmation based on discussions on 'what Europe is', risks spiralling into an exercise of self-destruction. So far, efforts to articulate a viable and cross-cultural model of European identity have been half-hearted at their best. Simultaneously, when we move from the terrain of identity to the terrain of political belonging via citizenship, *whiteness* has been the historically predominant framework of reference in terms of racial and ethnic identity of the continent at least from colonial times onwards (Bonnett and Nayak 2003, 302). Yet, within this same framework of *whiteness*, there are internal articulations of 'otherness' focusing in particular on Eastern (Kuus 2004) and Southern European countries (Zaccaria 2015). These differentiations between 'core' Europeans and 'other Europeans' have an important effect when it comes to narratives about intra-European migration, as Brexit demonstrates.

In this context, the advent of both endogenous and exogenous 'crises', such as the 2008 financial crisis or the relatively recent 'Refugees / Migrants crisis', seem to have significantly threatened Europe's sense of 'self' (Laffan 2016, 916). Not only there appears the need to interrogate oneself about 'who counts as European', but uncertainty also arises with respect to the tools deployed to gather and crystallise that knowledge. More in general, the very language of 'crisis' appears to have infiltrated European vocabulary, both at the level of the elites, the media and popular culture. The result has been that the existential condition of the European continent seems to have become one of chronic uncertainty, unpredictability and anticipation of yet more 'shocks', 'emergencies' or 'exceptional events' to come in future years. The dominant currency in today's European politics seems, therefore, the politics of fear (Kirstoglou and Tsimouris, 2015; Postelnicescu, 2016). In this context, the promotion of a language and rhetoric of 'the crisis' serves important ideological purposes. The determination of a state of 'crisis', as De Genova et al. remind us (2016) presupposes the existence of a foregone situation of 'stability', undermined by an unsettling or shocking event. This may be understood, along similar lines to Agamben's 'state of exception', as the prerequisite for the justification of specific 'controversial policies' both at the domestic and, possibly, supranational level (De Genova 2002). In the European context, the advent of these 'crises' leads to various kinds of mobilisations of the most regressive and reactionary features of 'Europeanness': the

protection of the national or supranational territory, the protection of the European people – read *white* European (Linke 1999; Goldberg 2006) - as well as rejection of the non-European ‘other’. Ultimately, the proliferation of the various narratives of ‘crisis’ across Europe, fundamentally contributes to the creation of a mentality of ‘continuous re-entrenchment’ into narrow identitarian micro and macro positions across the continent which further catalyses and exposes the internal contradictions of both concepts of ‘European Identity’ and ‘European Citizenship’.

The concepts of ‘European Identity’ and ‘European Citizenship’ cannot be used interchangeably, as the former refers to the traits (real or ideal) that characterise a certain individual as being ‘European’, whilst the latter more narrowly defines the legal status of belonging to the European polity through citizenship of one of its member states. The two, however, are inextricably intertwined as it can be said that European citizenship builds on the existence of a shared notion of what it means to be ‘European’. In the last few years, there has been a multiplication of discussions on the nature of both European Identity and Citizenship. On the one hand, there is a notion of a ‘Europe for Europeans’ (Checkel and Katzenstein 2009, 14) which moves from an obvious assumption of Europe as being *white*. On the other hand, as the same authors have highlighted, there is a vision of a multiracial and multicultural Europe. Transversally to this characterisation stands Benhabib’s (2005, 675) analysis on Europe, for whom Europe is characterised by a strong conflict between *sovereignty* and *hospitality*:

The EU is caught among contradictory currents which move it toward norms of cosmopolitan justice in the treatment of those who are within its boundaries, while leading it to act in accordance with outmoded Westphalian conceptions of unbridled sovereignty towards those who are on the outside.

In Benhabib’s (2005, 673) work, transnational migration is identified as having played a crucial role in the definition of this tension. Here it is pertinent to ask how the European continent can full respect of its ‘universal’ principles whilst recalibrating and/or compressing national sovereignty and an acknowledgment of the real ethnic composition of the continent. Can this riddle between *sovereignty* and *hospitality*, described by Benhabib, ever be solved?

One way of looking at this ‘crisis’ of purpose that Europe is undergoing, is to consider the proposal advanced by Ponzanesi (2016, 164) for whom the very idea of Europe as being characterised by singularity and exceptionalism should be radically obliterated, in favour of an opening up of the European project as being fundamentally undefined and unfinished. In this

1 regard, Ponzanesi is not alone in proposing that *plurality*, rather than *singularity*, should be one
2 of the defining features of Europe. The open-ended, plural and undefined nature of Europe has
3 been discussed extensively in the literature (Soysal, 1994; Balibar 2004; Delanty 2005, Painter
4 2008, Castiglione 2009) and represents, in this regard, a fascinating domain of investigation
5 and exploration of the challenges that await Europe. It is also an opportunity to abandon pre-
6 conceptions about Europe's role in world affairs in light of its history. More in particular,
7 embracing an open-ended vision of Europe, of its identity and its citizenship criteria, may mean
8 that we are finally ready to engage with what Bhambra (2015, 188) defines Europe's
9 'postcolonial present'. In Bhambra's words [3] (2015, 188), this means finally addressing the
10 legacy of Europe's colonial and imperial history in the definition of the current challenges to
11 Europe coming from a presumed 'outside'. Once again, the challenge is configured as an
12 ontological one (is Europe *white*? Can Europe be *black*?) and an epistemological one (how does
13 the adoption of a postcolonial lens change the perception of 'Europeanness'?).

14 Acknowledging these challenges, such as the 'Refugees / Migrants' crisis and 'Brexit',
15 can definitely cast a new image of Europe and open a critical conversation about the 'meaning'
16 that should or should not be attributed to the European project. Ultimately, this endeavour
17 requires a close examination of the ways in which some forms of knowledge about what it
18 means 'to be European' are created at the detriment of other narratives and/or individuals. In
19 this regard, the 'Refugees / Migrants' crisis and 'Brexit' all offer insights in the creation of these
20 forms of *official* and *subjugated* knowledges on Europe and urge us to reconsider narratives of
21 European belonging and identity.

22 **Borders are dead, long live the borders!**

23 At a time in which the borders have been moved from the physical space to remote
24 locations such as computers, databases and offices (Broeders 2007; Tsianos and Karakayali
25 2010), and technology has enabled us to shift from a 'physical crossing' of borders to a 'control
26 of flow' (Maurits 2015, 513), physical walls made of concrete, steel, barbed wire and other
27 materials are proliferating in our backyards. Balibar (2009) has aptly described Europe as a
28 'borderland', that is to say a continent in which borders are relentlessly displaced from their
29 original *locus* and are placed at its very heart, under various non-conventional guises.
30 Ironically, the more we are reminded of the inescapability of global connections and mobility,

the more we respond with outmoded and outlandish solutions to contain those global flows of people. Hungary's border with Serbia built to deter migrants, or Trump's intention to build a wall with Mexico in the years to come, are two of the most patent examples of this short-sightedness.

In the context of this radical de-materialisation of the physical borders, the sociology of borders appears more important than ever in order to understand lines of political, ideological, social and economic demarcation that create multifarious forms of 'radical otherness' and transform cross-border interactions within Europe and outside of it. The sociology of borders not only helps us to understand the ontological foregrounding of the European project of integration. The border, as will be shown, is also the place where information on 'Europeanness' is gathered, processed and often arbitrarily filtered and selected (Hansen 2004). The development of 'border studies', as described by Liikanen (2010), in particular, seems to have been fuelled, among other factors, precisely by the growing process of European integration. In this context, the delineation of the 'physical' borders of Europe is never an innocent operation. As Pickles (2005, 358) and Bueno Lacy and van Hotum (2014, 480) have argued, there is an important productive element in the creation of these geographical cartographies, with important and undeniable reverberations in both domestic and foreign policy. The cartographic definition of Europe is directly related to the ontological question on what counts as Europe, as Delanty (2006, 183) has argued. Complementary to this, is a two-fold dynamics whereby the 'external' borders of Europe become more important than ever, whilst the demarcation between different 'internal' borders in Europe loses significance (Delanty 2006, 185). In light of 'Brexit', however, this last argument may be questioned by the rise of nationalist, extreme right-wing and populist political parties throughout the continent which challenge the assumption of the ever-growing irrelevance of intra-European borders[4]. Ultimately, the question to be asked seems to be if Europe can ever become that place in which its *interior* / *exterior* are indeterminate, as Maurits (2015, 505) has suggested.

In this scenario, the abstract concept of the 'European border' becomes one of the 'fetishes of identity', a fictitiously real reminder of the importance of insulated belonging against the contaminating effect of migration and transnational flows of individuals. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the parallel bodies of literature on both 'borderless Europe' and 'Fortress Europe' (Delanty 2006, 185). Nonetheless, it is possible to reflect on the centrality of the border as a heuristic device enabling the creation and fine-tuning of the concept of

1 'European identity' and, by extension, of 'European citizenship'. Here, it is crucial to think about
2 the creation, activation or re-entrenchment of the border promotes and suppresses various
3 types of 'knowledges' on Europe from a Foucauldian perspective. The concept of the
4 'anthropology of the encounter', based on the experience of the 'misunderstanding' (*malinteso*)
5 happening at the limit of *borders* or *frontiers*, as understood by Franco La Cecla (2009), can be
6 useful in this context. This perspective can be combined with Walia's (2013) concept of
7 'border imperialism' (2013). Fostering an ideal conversation between these two different
8 perspectives on the sociological, anthropological and political importance of the borders, will
9 show how forms of knowledge about Europe – as inextricably bound to forms of knowledge
10 about the 'other' – emerge and are circulated and/or suppressed within the context of the
11 border.
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14 Tsianos and Karakayali (2010, 374) have argued that since the 1999 Treaty of
15 Amsterdam of the European Union, there has been a process of creation of a 'European Border
16 Regime', where the word *regime* appears to be closely associated with practices of bargaining
17 and negotiation. In this regard, it is necessary to ask how Europeans themselves become able
18 to distinguish who is a fellow European and who is not. Deprived of their immediate geo-
19 political significance, borders (and more specifically the external borders of the EU), can
20 become an epistemological device that serves the purpose of laying the groundwork for the
21 construction of coherent narratives of 'core Europeanness', catalysing specific forms of
22 knowledge at the detriment of others.
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25 The theoretical contribution of the anthropologist La Cecla (2009, 9), shows the
26 potential of creating, exchanging and circulating knowledge about 'Europeanness' in liminal
27 spaces. In particular, La Cecla argues that the preservation of borders creates the fundamental
28 prerequisite for a dialectic process of *misunderstanding*, followed by a phase of *explanation and*
29 *confrontation*, finally leading to a process of *creolisation* of identities and belongings. A first
30 relevant distinction that La Cecla (2009, 133) offers, is the one between the *border* (understood
31 as a limit not to be crossed) and the *frontier* (as a locus where two diversities *confront*
32 themselves). This distinction emphasises the physicality of the *frontier* not as a neat
33 demarcation line (contrarily to the *border*) but as a fuzzy space where there is space for the
34 expression of the *misunderstanding* and there is potential for its resolution. The very existence
35 of the *misunderstanding*, according to La Cecla (2009, 133-134) forces us to explain, to
36 translate, our differences in order to make them accessible, thus facilitating a *syncretic* (La Cecla
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2009, 147) appropriation of some of the traits of the other whilst maintaining the irreducibility of one's own identity. La Cecla's concept of the *frontier*, if applied to the context of Europe and the EU, opens up alternative spaces of knowledge about Europeanness centrally situated in the Mediterranean, on the Atlantic shores of Europe, and at the heart of the Balkans. Ideally, the explicit research for a misunderstanding with the 'radical others' in the liminal spaces of Europe can dramatically help in questioning, and potentially displacing, the hegemonic conceptual category of the 'European' as an archetypal citizen of a 'Northern European virtuous state'. This is ever more important if we consider, as Dainotto (2000, 380) has done, that the creation of the European 'South' was, historically, the precursor and precondition for the rise of Orientalism in XIX century, as it enabled Europe to establish within its own confines a core (the North) and a periphery (the South).

As for LaCecla's concept of the border, it can be argued that it is configured as an epistemological challenge. Firstly, because it forces us to confront with our given-for-granted identity at an ontological level (what makes us what we are?). Secondly, it drags us in a world of epistemological uncertainty (the *misunderstanding*), that is crucial to question the way in which we process information about others and ourselves (is what we know about others true?). At the same time, however, La Cecla's fascinating position rests on an idealised perception of cultural negotiations taking place in a dilated times and whose leading actors are seen as possessing equal agency. To a certain extent, La Cecla disregards that the process of *syncretic* appropriation of selected elements of 'otherness' may harbour power dynamics proper of the creation of hegemonic knowledges at the detriment of peripheral knowledges about what it means to be 'European'. Whilst alternative information about 'who counts as European' may be fully available, individuals can actively decide to marginalise alternative forms of knowledge about 'Europeanness' depending on the extant power relations in the specific situation.

Walia's (2013) concept of 'border imperialism', in this regard, seems to diametrically challenge the premises of La Cecla's argument. If we were to apply sociological categories, we could label La Cecla's contribution as being based on consensus, whereas Walia's could be seen as inherently conflictual in the way in which it sees the process of creation of knowledge within borderlands. In fact, contrarily to La Cecla, Walia (2013, 6) highlights the dimension of conflictual dynamics of power at play in the enforcement of borders:

(...) border imperialism illuminates how colonial anxieties about identity and inclusion

1 *within* Western borders are linked to the racist justifications for imperialist missions
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3 *beyond* Western borders that generate cycles of mass displacement. We are all,
4
5 therefore, simultaneously separated by and bound together by the violences of border
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7 imperialism.

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9 Walia's argument emphasises the fact that it is the very existence of an imperialist system of
10 border enforcement that prevents individuals from establishing points of commonality beyond
11 factionalised allegiances that are artificially manufactured through the border (Walia 2013, 7).
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13 From the point of the ontology and epistemology of Europeanness, Walia's theory sees the
14 border as interrupting the flow of information, exchange that would normally happen in a
15 'borderless' world. Hence, whereas La Cecla indicates the border as a catalyser of the process of
16 knowledge production beyond given schemata, Walia conceives the border as the primary
17 obstacle that prevents individuals to truly broaden their alliances and allegiances and prevents
18 the process of de-colonisation of identities, mobilities and legal statuses (especially the legal
19 status of 'the migrant'). With its fundamental anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist outlook, therefore,
20 Walia's work highlights the productive aspects of border production and enforcement beyond
21 the actions of the individual, calling directly into question the actions of institutions. Though
22 symmetrically opposed, La Cecla and Walia both connect the existence of the border to
23 processes of 'knowledge-production' concerning the identities of individuals caught in these
24 liminal spaces.
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34 In light of the current 'crises' that grip Europe, the border (in both its material and
35 immaterial form) acts as the inescapable epistemological device both for the unpacking of our
36 own identities, as well as the definition of the radical non-European other. This is also because
37 the border confronts us with individuals' *racialised* experience of crossing territories when
38 they are or not in possession of the credentials to do so. LaCecla's and Walia's arguments
39 present respective points of strength and weakness but help us to place the border at the very
40 core of European politics. Without resorting to a genealogy on how Europeanness has been
41 construed at the various borders of the continent throughout history, it seems unlikely that the
42 European Union can effectively address the current exogenous ('the Refugees / Migrants
43 Crisis') and endogenous ('Brexit') challenges.
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51 The remainder of the article will consider these two major points of 'crisis' for Europe
52 such as the 'Refugees / Migrants Crisis' and 'Brexit' in order to illustrate the centrality of the
53 border in the production of Europeanness. This will be done by exploring the ways in which the
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articulation of various material or immaterial lines of fractures defining ‘otherness’ end up creating rigid forms of knowledge on what European identity and European citizenship are. Albeit differently, the ‘Refugees / Migrants Crisis’ and ‘Brexit’ both require the conceptualisation of ‘the other’ in order to function, be it the figure of the ‘migrant’, the ‘terrorist’, or the ‘European stealing our jobs’.

Lost at Sea: European Citizenship and the ‘Refugees / Migrants Crisis’

In the past few years, the ‘Refugees / Migrants Crisis’ has dominated the public arena in most, if not all, EU member states. Whilst testing the social fabric of solidarity within the EU, this ‘crisis’ has also had direct consequences on the conceptualisation and re-signification of European borders. In discussing the institutional responses of the EU to the Euro-zone crisis, as well as to the ‘Refugees / Migrants crisis’, Caruso (2014, 16) has argued:

In what counts as ordinary parlance in post-crisis Europe, the fate of those in transit to our shores can be downgraded from scandal to technical error, and from systemic problem to peripheral glitch.

Here, the author introduces the dichotomy between core/periphery of Europe, thus implicitly reinforcing the idea that the ‘messiness’ or ‘fuzziness’ around the external borders of the EU should be either minimised or kept within that very peripheral sphere. Since the 1960s, the Mediterranean has been cast as ‘the most problematic flank of Europe, with interstate crises and conflicts endemic, giving rise to a bitterly contested and fractured geopolitical space’ (Jones 2006, 420). Simultaneously, there seems to be a *racialised* logic in the selective process of opening up the EU borders eastwards [5], by simultaneously sealing them southwards (Favell 2009, 188). Parallel to the process of European integration in the last seven decades, therefore, differentiated processes of construction of the ‘non-European other’ seem to have taken place alongside the southern and eastern limits of the EU, along those that Carr (2015, 68) has defined as being the ‘compensatory borders of the EU’.

The Sicilian island of Lampedusa, seventy miles East of Tunisia, represents the perfect exemplification of the enmeshment between geography, (bio-political) power and European identity. As one of the most important ports of call in the Mediterranean for people seeking to reach European shores, Lampedusa has come to represent one of the peripheral ideological

1 battlegrounds, similarly to Calais, Melilla, Lesvos and Idomeni (to name a few), where the
2 building blocks of European identity and citizenship are assembled and layered. As Dines et al.
3 (2014, 433) have aptly argued, Lampedusa has been wrongly considered as an exclusively
4 Italian problem, whereas it should also be understood as a *border zone* that actively produces
5 the de-humanisation of individuals crossing the Mediterranean with an important role in the
6 active production of notions of 'European citizenship'. In this regard, drawing from Agamben,
7 Dines et al. (2014, 430) have suggested that Lampedusa has been framed as a 'spectacle of bare
8 life'. Lampedusa, Calais, Melilla, Lesvos and Idomeni not only produce the conditions for the de-
9 humanisation of migrants and refugees, but they also create crucial forms of knowledge about
10 the migrants' and refugees' 'radical otherness' that find wide recognition and acknowledgment
11 in public discourses and end up feeding dominant narratives about Europeanness throughout
12 the continent.

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22 However, if Lampedusa seems to epitomise one of the symptoms of the 'border
23 imperialism' described by Walia (2013), there is also be the potential for the nurturing of
24 counter- or alter-narratives prompted and catalysed by La Cecla's (2009) *misunderstanding*.
25 Like Calais, Melilla, Lesvos and Idomeni, Lampedusa should be transformed from hard *border*
26 into *frontier*, if its political and ontological and epistemological function changes. Rather than
27 acting as a buffer zone between the 'core' of Europe and the migrant *others*, Lampedusa should
28 acquire a status of central liminality in the construction of European identity and citizenship.
29 Such process can be enacted if current relations of power in the enforcement of Walia's 'border
30 imperialism' are radically put into question and, potentially reversed. As Carr (2015) has
31 documented in his book 'Fortress Europe' by talking to people living in Lampedusa, La Valletta,
32 Lesvos and Samos, when confronted with the arrival of migrants and refugees, the local
33 population only superficially displayed distrust and fear, eventually ending up bonding with the
34 migrants and providing for them as best as they could. Far from depicting an idyllic picture of
35 the relationship entertained by the inhabitants of Lampedusa with the arriving migrants, it is
36 nonetheless possible to argue that these 'liminal spaces of the EU' are places of negotiation of
37 respective needs, identities, fears and aspirations mediated by *racialised* relations of power.
38 Furthermore, because of their geographical position, these places were already constitutively
39 shaped by migration as an everyday phenomenon, long before the European Union had been
40 established and 'compensatory borders' had acquired that crucial importance for the safeguard
41 of the European project.

In order to lay the foundations for the radical transformation of European ‘spectacles of bare life’ (Dines et al. 2014, 430), however, it is important to reflect upon the construction of the ‘migrant’ in the European space. Epistemological practices for the categorisation of different migrants, whose worth is recognised according to class, ethnic and possibly gendered lines, represents a crucial component in the definition of hegemonic understanding of European citizenship. More than often, the categorisation of migrants in Europe, and well beyond the European continent, ends up delineating a sharp distinction between the *deserving* and *undeserving* migrants (Chauvin and Garcés-Mascareñas 2014; Huschke 2014). *Deservingness* is an epistemological device for the attribution of aspirational Europeanness. It is undeniable, however, that this attribution of (European) status on the basis of deservingness harbours a strongly racialized logic based on hierarchical ordering of different typologies of ‘migrant’.

In distinguishing migration in Europe into the categories of ‘ethnic (non EU) migration’, ‘new intra-European “elite” migration’ and ‘East-West Migration’ (following EU’s 2004 Enlargement), Favell (2009, 167), has captured well the intersection between class and race that characterises the production of new aspiring European citizens. However, Favell’s taxonomies of EU migration acquires more importance if cross-compared with Nash’s (2009) five categories of citizenship (*super-citizens*, *marginal citizens*, *quasi-citizens*, *sub-citizens* and *un-citizens*). Nash (2009) highlights, in particular, the fact that within the same polity, individuals with different ethnic backgrounds, who enjoy different levels of economic and social security, as well as having distinct patterns and entitlements to mobility, ends up occupying different positions in the actual ranking of citizenship. If Nash’s (2009) categories of *super-citizens* (the elite of cosmopolitans citizens) and *marginal citizens* (citizens who are socially or economically marginalised) somehow resonate with our traditional categorisations, the introduction of the other three (*quasi-citizens*, *sub-citizens*, *un-citizens*) leads us to engage directly with the productive aspects of construction of the ‘deservingness’ of individuals within a polity. In fact, both *quasi-citizens* (long-term residents in a given country), *sub-citizens* (individuals without entitlements to benefits in a given country – i.e. people awaiting asylum) and *un-citizens* (undocumented migrants) are subjected to scrutiny in order to ascertain the rightfulness of their claim to either be allowed on the territory or be included in the citizenry. In this context, one could note that the overwhelming majority of individuals in the category of ‘ethnic (non EU) migration’ and ‘East-West migration’ described by Favell (2009), would hardly be able to ever ascend the ranks of citizenship and go past the status of *quasi-citizens*, in Nash’s

(2009) terms. It follows that we can only challenge hegemonic knowledges about what it means to be a 'deserving' member (citizen) of Europe, if we fully and critically recognise the extent to which the intricate relationship between European citizenship and migration is fundamentally permeated by both questions of race and ethnicity, as well as social class.

Hence, when confronted with the task of discerning the *barycentre* of Europe and 'Europeanness', one cannot discount the importance of migration. The Italian island of Lampedusa, for instance, not only represents a 'spectacle of bare life' for the migrants reaching its shores (Dines et al. 2014, 430), but it also acts as both a mirror and a prism of the image that Europe is constructing of itself. Because of the restrictive ontological foundations of Europeanness based on the inherent whiteness and middle-class status of its inhabitants, it is not surprising to see what Turner (2007, 289) has described as the emergence of an 'immobility regime' directly related to the fostering of an 'enclave society' in which migrants and refugees are increasingly controlled and subjected to surveillance. More specifically, the limited ontological horizon of Europeanness, and the related epistemological tools that enable its characterisation and definition, point to the materialisation of a European citizenship and identity based on retrenchment and isolation and protection of regressive presumably 'European' traits. A radical departure from this model would both acknowledge the *syncretic* production of encounters based around contradictions, misunderstandings and negotiations of meanings and cultural, social, and political values, as suggested by LaCecla (2009), as well as taking seriously the neo-colonial violence of existing migration policies and borders pointed out by Walia (2013). Within this context, the 'Refugees / Migrants Crisis' represents only one facet of the phenomenon relating to the productive role of borders. As the recent vote on the exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union in 2016 demonstrates, the border (or lack thereof) acquires a new ideological significance as an essential tool of demarcation or proximity to the European Union.

'Splendid Isolation' or 'Fearful Retreat'? *Brexit* and the Threat to European Citizenship

On 23rd June 2016, voters in the UK decided with a Referendum that they wanted to abandon the EU. With this decision, the UK was not just leaving the EU, but it was inevitably triggering a process of re-definition of both national and European identity, with important reverberations across the continent. In a way, Brexit represented a challenge to the ontological

status of Europe, insofar as it fundamentally questions what it means to be European and when one ceases to be European. The problematic geo-political relationship to Europe by the UK, however, has deep and complex roots. Albeit in a limited way, it is possible to draw a parallel with the UK's XIX century foreign policy of 'splendid isolation'. In this regard, Howard's (1962, 38) explanation of this expression seems particularly useful:

Primarily, of course, [the word 'splendid'] was the expression of the complacency of the period concerning Britain's position as 'the greatest, the most powerful, the wisest country in the world'. (...) But for some the word 'splendid' had another and less obvious implication. It expressed the assurance that in her difficulties Britain could count on the loyal support of her self-governing colonies.

Howard's reflections, help to add depth to the suggestion advanced by Wellings (2016, 2) for whom the UK membership in the EU can be comprehended as an 'interregnum in England's imperial past and its global future'. What seems to emerge, in this context, is the idea of an instrumental attachment to the EU, operated by the UK, that is functional to maintaining or improving one's position vis-à-vis the economic and political globalisation and the demise of the 'empire'. Here the colonial matrix of British double opportunism (towards Europe and towards former colonies) is particularly evident. Similarly, Oliver (2015, 413), has described UK membership to the EU as a sort of 'marriage of convenience' ultimately aimed at enhancing British prestige and wealth, rather than as a way of working towards the project of achieving an ever closer European integration. At a glance, these suggestions cast light on the extent to which the UK may have internalised or resisted the concept of 'Europeanness' and it also leads to questioning what type of challenge to the ontological (and epistemological) status of Europe Brexit may pose. Ultimately, as Oliver (2015, 409) has argued, the question about British role's in the EU also sheds light on the broader process of European integration and the European project at large.

It would be disingenuous, however, to merely attribute the result of the EU Referendum[6] in June 2016, to the UK's own 'exceptionalist' agenda. Whilst a strong component of nostalgia and an attempt to cling onto the 'imperial destiny' can be said to be important components of contemporary British national identity, the capacity of the UK population of relating to the idea of 'Europe' should not be underestimated. In this regard, one can echo Diez Medrano (2009, 86) in saying that European citizens often feel that they do not have leverages on decisions adopted in Brussels or Strasbourg and may, for this reason, reject

the project of European integration. In a specular way, however, it can also be argued that individuals in the UK currently display the highest 'knowledge deficit' on the EU across the continent (Startin 2016, 4) and, thus, may not feel a strong sense of attachment to the European project as a whole. These suggestions can also be coupled with the strong sense of Euroscepticism / Europhobia pervading British politics (McCormack 2005, 70 and 84). Brexit, therefore, seems to have catalysed various feelings of estrangement from European affairs felt by a considerable part of the UK population, leading to a relatively abrupt detachment from the European polity.

The issue of the 'knowledge deficit' illustrated by Startin (2016, 4) is of particular significance here, as it points to the cultural capital possessed in order to appreciate what Europe is and who should or should not belong to it. In this regard, the sociology of borders becomes useful again. In discussing the roots of British Euroscepticism in connection with Brexit, Startin (2016, 5) has argued that the English Channel can be considered as one of the elements setting the stage for this epochal event. The English Channel, therefore, can be understood as a *border*, rather than a *frontier*, following La Cecla's (2009) differentiation. Hence, it can be argued, that not only the Channel acts as a buffer zone between Europe and the UK, but it also complicates the process by which misunderstandings may unfold and resolve themselves. This appears even more relevant if one takes into account Fliegstein's (2009, 133) theory which posits that the acquisition of European identity is tightly related with repeated interactions with other European citizens with whom one develops a shared sense of solidarity. One may go as far as say that the British ontological and epistemological approach to Europeanness is strongly mediated by the presence of a geographical obstacle like the English Channel.

If one adds into the equation the so-called 'Refugees / Migrants Crisis', it is possible to see that the Channel simultaneously prevents *misunderstandings* from taking place both with fellow 'Europeans' but also with the people amassed in the camps in Calais. At the same time, however, the English Channel should not be seen from a deterministic perspective as inevitably leading to disavowal of the UK's European identity. It is apparent that, in post-Brexit UK, there only seems to be space for the strengthening of mechanisms of radical demarcation from both 'the European other' and 'the non-European other'. Ultimately, Brexit seems to strengthen the principle of 'border imperialism' as described by Walia (2013), a sort of retrenchment from the complexity of both European and world affairs that appears more as a 'fearful retreat' than as a

newly found ‘splendid isolation’. For obvious geo-morphological reasons, the English Channel places the UK in an easier position to enact this process of withdrawal than other EU member states. However, the questioning of the Schengen Treaty from various EU member states poses similar challenges across the continent, with the possibility that various EU member states may, in fact, undertake their own ‘fearful retreat’.

Ultimately, however, the process leading to Brexit leads to question not only why countries may want to leave the EU or whether the EU’s survival is at stake, but also what kind of construction of ‘Europeanness’ is circulated within these complex dynamics. Given our theoretical premises about the emergence of ‘buried’ or ‘disqualified’ forms of knowledge, it could be argued that British notion of Europeanness would be even more politically and ideologically conservative (read neo-colonial) than the one circulating in the European mainland. In this regard, it could be suggested that we are confronted with a sort of *Russian dolls* system, whereby British ‘border imperialism’ is placed at the very heart of the European Union’s ‘border imperialism’. The conjunction of the two phenomena leads, in turn, to a process of variable geometries in the deployment of hard borders that has several consequences. Firstly, the nexus between UK and EU ‘border imperialism(s)’ projects both the UK and the EU as having monolithic and homogeneous cultural, political, and social identities. Secondly, it ensures the uniform propagation of narratives of *Europeanness vs. non-Europeanness*, as well as *Britishness vs. non-Britishness*, well beyond the borders of the EU itself. Thirdly, this configuration of borders substantially forecloses the opening of spaces of negotiation or challenge of these antediluvian conceptions of both national and supranational identity. Hence, from a broader perspective, Brexit not only leads to the crystallisation of a forgone and fictitious British identity, but it also further essentialises European identity as such. This is because, in order to refuse a certain image of ‘Europe’, it is necessary to delineate its presumably essential features and simplify the complex social, cultural, historical and political constellations giving rise to the otherwise multifarious and incongruent concept of ‘Europe’ which emerges as the synthesis of the various member states contributions. Brexit, in this regard, has contributed to bring firmly to the surface discussions on the ‘whiteness’ of Europe. This however, has only been possible, precisely because Europe is *already* post-colonial in its historical, demographic and socio-cultural make up (Rigo 2005). Ultimately, therefore, Brexit appear as an attempt to stop, alter or escape that process of decolonisation of Europeanness that is inevitably in motion across the continent. One could even go as far as arguing that Brexit goes counter that attempt to allow the emergence of ‘new’ forms of knowledge about

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2 Europeanness that are not rooted in whiteness, insofar as it reinstates national sovereignty
3 and superiority and is fuelled by fear of 'contamination' by the European and non-European
4 other.
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7 This suppression of alternative knowledges about Europe may have to do with the
8 hybridisation of British history, with the multiple connections that the UK entertains with the
9 'continent', and with the problematic idea that one can simply brush away one's Europeanness
10 a referendum. Boris Johnson's claim that Brexit did not mean '(...) in any sense, leaving
11 Europe' [7] illustrates perfectly this conundrum. It also represents a further incitement to reflect
12 on the fact that, regardless of Brexit, the UK will hardly be able to disentangle itself from Europe
13 in the future, given its crucial participation to the ontological construction of the notion of
14 Europeanness in the first place. What emerges, rather, is that interdependence between the
15 various components of the European polity is as much a matter of decisions taken by Eurocrats
16 in Brussels or Strasbourg, as much as it is profoundly shaped by conversations in the social,
17 cultural and political emerging *Eurosphere*.
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28 **A New Approach to European Identity and European Citizenship?**

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32 This article has offered hints for reflection on the triangular dynamics whereby
33 migration and enhanced processes of 'bordering-othering' (visible in the context of Brexit) are
34 extensively putting into question the concept of 'European Citizenship' and 'European Identity'.
35 Mediated by the ever-present notion of 'crisis', this triangular dynamics is effectively shaping
36 Europe as a continent continuously characterised by points of criticality, uncertainty and forms
37 of defence and strategic retreat into national(ist) conceptions of belonging. Ultimately, the
38 article with the question of whether Europe can continue to ground its identity on neo-liberal
39 and neo-colonial mechanisms in order to survive in the long term. Simultaneously, the article
40 considers whether Europe needs incorporate in its ethos a critical reappraisal of the legacy of
41 its colonial past and the mechanisms of (economic) exploitation that form the basis of its
42 success and survival.
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51 The widespread rhetoric of 'crisis' permeating the *Eurosphere*, points to the existence of
52 an ontological and epistemological crisis that concerns both the European Union and the
53 European continent more broadly. The lack of a cohesive political, social and cultural identity in
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front of phenomena such as migration or centrifugal movements such as Brexit, exposes the EU and the European continent to a cronicisation of the ‘crisis’, a normalisation of an ‘immobility regime’, as suggested by Turner (2007, 289). The epistemological incapacity to acknowledge the interrelatedness of Europe with its southern Mediterranean neighbours (the Maghreb, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East) has profound consequences on the ontological construction of Europe and ultimately, could bring to a halt this ambitious economic, political and social experiment. This incapacity is foregrounded in the reluctance to see current patterns of migration as being specular to widespread forms of neo-liberal economic exploitations by European countries across the world.

As Zhang (2014, 247) has affirmed, the way in which issues of citizenship and migration are addressed at the European level, shows the existence of a dilemma between ‘postnationalism and the territorially confined citizenship’. Ultimately, national sovereignty always seems to resurge when the vocabulary of ‘crisis’ is deployed, thus leaving little room to imagine what a European continent based on ‘common values’ would look like. At the same time, this epistemological exercise of ‘reconstruction of ‘common [European] values’ would inevitably create other fracturing lines of ‘othering’, as Liikanen (2010, 23) has aptly commented. Furthermore, as suggested by Levy, Heinlein and Breuer (2011, 140) although the construction of common ‘European memories’^[8] should act as an ideological glue for the various European populations in order to transcend nationalist narratives, it is still the case that these memories will still heavily be immersed within national history. Within this process, both the ‘Refugees / Migrants Crisis’ and ‘Brexit’ seem to somehow accelerate the necessity of thinking about Europe in radically novel terms. This critical engagement, however, requires a deep reflexive appraisal of the way in which Europe flourishes on Europe’s colonial past, economic exploitation of cheap (foreign) labour, as well as the dismantlement of the social and welfare system and of the social cohesion of local communities.

Saving European identity and European citizenship in ‘times of crisis’, therefore, only makes sense if the response is immersing European citizens and, crucially, non-citizens (economic migrants, refugees, disenfranchised groups without actual enjoyment of the full array of citizenship and human rights) deeply into the political arena. This would trigger, in Mouffe’s (2000) words, a radical shift from an *antagonistic* to an *agonistic* form of politics in which individuals can reconsider and reappraise the common values upon which they have been grounding their relationships of proximity, creation of alterity and exclusion of the

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'others'.

For Peer Review

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Notes

[1] The Guardian, *EU is facing existential crisis, says Jean-Claude Juncker*, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/13/jean-claude-juncker-eu-is-facing-existential-crisis>. last accessed: 30 October 2016.

[2] In this article, the expression ‘Refugee / Migrants Crisis’ will be used in order to have the reader to engage with the various problematics significations associated with the two terms, as well as asking the reader to engage with the idea of whether the two terms can be, in fact, used interchangeably and, if so, what ideological justifications underpin this slippage in language.

[3] Interestingly, Bhambra (2015, 188) has also observed that two among the most important scholars to engage with the concepts of European ‘cosmopolitanism’ and ‘multiculturalism’, such as Ulrich Beck and Jürgen Habermas, have failed to acknowledge the legacy of colonialism and imperialism in the definition and development of these phenomena.

[4] For more extensive discussion of this aspect, please refer to Delanty (2006, 191).

[5] See Carr (2015, 36) for a discussion on how the EU has tried to avoid the creation of a new “Iron Curtain” alongside the Eastern European borders.

[6] For a thorough discussion on the appropriateness of the instrument of the Referendum for exiting the EU please see Oliver (2015) and Reeves (2016).

[7][7] The Independent, *Boris Johnson says Brexit Vote does not mean leaving Europe ‘in any Sense’*, available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/boris-johnson-brexit-vote-does-not-mean-leaving-europe-in-any-sense-eu-referendum-reshuffle-a7137056.html>, last accessed 12th November 2016.

[8] Levy, Heinlein and Breuer (2011, 140) also refer here to the ‘memory imperative’ which

gives rise to a process of 'reflexive particularism' whereby it is possible to appraise the nation state through the lenses of an 'emerging European memory scape'.

For Peer Review

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